

C E N T R A L I N T E L L I G E N C E A G E N C Y
O F F I C E O F N A T I O N A L E S T I M A T E S

15 June 1967

MEMORANDUM FOR THE DIRECTOR

SUBJECT: Probable Consequences of a Military Conflict in Nigeria

1. Armed conflict in Nigeria may break out at any moment. The purpose of this paper is to discuss the likely course of the fighting in its early stages and to consider some possible internal consequences.
2. General Gowon's Federal Nigerian Army is almost certainly preparing to attack Eastern Nigeria which seceded two weeks ago to become the Republic of Biafra. Gowon's preparations are hampered by logistical delays, communications weaknesses, poorly organized forces, and the onset of the rainy season. Yet, some sort of direct military confrontation seems virtually inevitable; Gowon is publicly committed to snuffing out the secession. Gowon and the military commanders appear to favor an early attack down the highway toward the Biafran capital, Enugu, some forty miles from the regional frontier. This may be accompanied by attempted

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action along the coast. If Gowon delays indefinitely, impatient local commanders may themselves take action against the East.

3. It is very difficult to estimate the outcome of any military encounter. There are few really reliable indicators to predict with much assurance probable combat performance by either side. The Eastern army is primarily a collection of hastily improvised units with little training and no experience under fire. Because its Ibo officers formerly provided the bulk of Nigeria's officer corps and Ibo technicians performed most of the skilled tasks, the East probably holds an edge in communications, planning, and maintenance. Its troops may be sufficiently motivated by defense of their homeland against traditional tribal foes to put up an effective resistance. The enlisted men in Gowon's forces are more experienced and somewhat better trained, but they probably lack sufficient logistical support and discipline to sustain any but the briefest of campaigns against the East.

4. If stalled in their initial thrust, the Federal troops (composed mostly of Tivs and other primitive northern tribesmen) are likely to withdraw to the north, or melt away. Whether in advance or retreat the movement of northern forces in the East is

- 2 -

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likely to be fairly disorderly, with considerable violence and pillaging. The Ibos might break and run at the outset for they have no prior history of fighting in units in modern warfare, thus enabling Gowon to capture Enugu. But if the Ibos manage to hold off an invading Federal force, or if the fighting is confined to inconclusive skirmishes, Biafra will almost certainly make good its claim to independence. The odds are about even that both sides will degenerate into marauding tribal bands, and if this occurs the situation could deteriorate badly with considerable civilian loss of life.

5. For these reasons, the chances are the Federal forces will be unable to put down the East's "rebellion." In the event of failure by force of arms, Lagos will be unable to count on external assistance to back its cause, for neither the Africans nor the Great Powers are disposed to intervene. Moreover, failure against the East would open the way to a breakdown of central authority and of order in other parts of Nigeria. Latent tribal antagonisms between the Yorubas of the Western Region and northern troops garrisoned there could erupt at any time. Professional thugs, formerly employed by political parties in the West, are likely to take advantage of the confusion to settle old scores,

- 3 -

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or simply to resort to general looting and banditry. Chief Awolowo, leader of the Western Region, would probably attempt to seize control of the Federal government, or at least to establish an independent regime in the Western Region. In the North, where political control is now also very fragile, there is likely to be considerable internal confusion and a revival of tribal antagonisms. Eventually, of course, some new pattern will emerge from all of this; perhaps in the form of separate states under traditional tribal or ethnic leaders. But, in the interim, there could be much loss of life throughout Nigeria, and some US nationals could be caught up in the violence though we foresee no organized campaign against foreigners.

6. Even if Federal forces should defeat those of Biafra there is only a slim chance that a federated Nigeria could be reestablished. Regional and tribal rivalries run too deep to permit any sort of lasting compromise. It would be almost impossible for Federal forces to garrison, let alone control, a defeated but deeply hostile Biafra. The Ibos now have a considerable supply of small arms and would probably use these to harass the occupiers in terrain favorable to irregular combat. Biafra's defeat would deter for a while secessionist considerations

in Western Nigeria, but the reprieve would probably be a short one. It is doubtful that Chief Awolowo would accept for long a secondary role in a political framework dominated by young northern military leaders, and political and personality differences would once again cause severe strains within the Lagos government.

7. Meanwhile, Nigerian petroleum production has been largely unaffected by the crisis. Nigeria ranks eleventh among world producers. The major producing fields are in the East and the Mid-West, with US interests in both regions. Neither the Federal government nor Biafra is at present interfering with the production or export of crude petroleum, but this could come to pass if hostilities broke out between the two, and there has already been some hold up in the shipment of refined products. Another problem is that of the payment of oil revenues. Lagos and Enugu each claims to be entitled to the revenues due in July from companies holding concessions in the East. Unless Biafra has been brought to heel, the oil firms will probably allocate the revenues to it. Companies doing business in the Mid-West will continue to pay Lagos. However, the fate of the tribally divided and militarily weak Mid-Western region is in doubt.

FOR THE BOARD OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES:

SHERMAN KENT
Chairman

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- 5 -

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